Implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on Small and Micro Enterprises’ Productivity in Mankweng Township

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The hegemony of SMEs in Mankweng Township has sparked the interest of researchers who aim to align them with the 4IR. The purpose of this study is to examine and provide constructive criticism on how the 4IR affects the productivity of SMEs. The argument is that SMEs in Mankweng Township are technologically lagging, resulting in low productivity. The research encompasses both positive and negative impacts of the 4IR on SMEs' productivity. The prevalence of SMEs in the area can be attributed to growth centres like the University of Limpopo, Mankweng Hospital, and Paledi Mall. These institutions attract students and employees, sustaining the local economy. Nonetheless, most SMEs in the Township are traditional and lack sophisticated technology. They are mainly located in South Africa's townships and rural regions, where they are easily accessible to the local communities. The growth of the 4IR has compelled these SMEs to adapt their conventional business practices to align with the rapidly changing technology.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study employed a quantitative approach to accomplish its objectives.

Findings: The research findings demonstrate that some SMEs are currently underperforming, experiencing a decline in customers due to limited financial resources, human resources and a lack of advanced technology amongst others.

Implications/Originality/Value: To address this issue, the study suggests that various stakeholders, including individuals, the private sector, and the government, should actively collaborate and provide concerted efforts and resources to support the growth and development of SMEs.

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Introduction
Throughout history, the world has undergone significant technological advancements that have led to radical changes. Currently, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) dominates the business landscape. The 4IR is characterized by innovations such as the Internet of Things (IoT), digitalization, 3-D printing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and robotics (Schwab, 2016; Ahmad, Fatima & Malik, 2021). This advanced technological phase brings both advantages and disadvantages to the business sector. Consequently, there exists a connection between the 4IR and Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs), particularly in how technology is incorporated into their operations. SMEs, including businesses like hair salons, car washes, panel beaters, shoe repair shops, internet cafés, and spaza shops, are impacted by the introduction of the 4IR, which may influence their ways of conducting business. SMEs play a crucial role in enhancing living standards (Maloka, 2013) and contribute to addressing social challenges by generating employment opportunities and fighting poverty, among other things (Meso and Manamela, 2015).

According to Xing and Marwala (2017), SMEs are currently in an exciting phase during the 4IR, presenting both complex and dialectical opportunities that have the potential to positively transform South African society. Halverson and Collins (2009: 8) also acknowledge that new technology offers radical opportunities but also significant challenges for SMEs in South Africa. Moos and Sambo (2018) point out that SMEs contribute to 36% of the total GDP in South Africa, while Vuba (2019) envisions that they could contribute 60-80% to the GDP as per the National Development Plan (NDP). The South African government recognizes the importance of SMEs in driving innovation, creating employment, and enhancing competitiveness. It aims to generate 90% of employment from SMEs by 2030 (Bhorat, Asmal, Lilenstein & Van Der Zee, 2018). SMEs are businesses that are closely connected to and serve the local community.

Mankweng Township is characterized by a significant presence and growth of SMEs, especially within the informal sector, aimed at enhancing business development in the area (Maloka, 2013). These SMEs in Mankweng Township are characterized by limited technological capabilities and insufficient resources to fully adapt to the 4IR. Consequently, the introduction of the 4IR is expected to bring about both advantages and challenges for the productivity of SMEs in Mankweng Township. The study aims to explore and analyze the implications of the 4IR on the productivity of these SMEs. Based on this context, the study suggests that the implementation of the 4IR has implications over the productivity of SMEs due to the numerous challenges they encounter such as financial and human resources.

Problem Statement
Recognizing the significant role played by SMEs in fostering development and generating employment, the advent of the 4IR poses a threat to these enterprises. This potentially leads to their decline and consequent repercussions of unemployment, poverty, and inequality in South Africa. According to the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) report from the first quarter of 2019, the SME sector employed approximately 10.8 million people in South Africa. Moreover, SEDA (2019) indicates that the number of SMEs in the country has been steadily increasing at a rate of 4.4% annually. The Limpopo Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism (LEDET) (2015) reveal that a significant portion of SMEs in Limpopo Province operate within the retail sector, with many involved in the selling of goods in informal shops. Similarly, in Mankweng Township, the majority of SMEs belong to the informal sector, encompassing various activities such as the sale of food, shoe repairing, catering, panel-beating, car-hiring, car wash, sewing, gardening, bakery, cleaning services, medical services, brick-manufacturing, hair salons, and internet cafés. The problem in this article is that SMEs have limited resources such as financial and human resources that could complement the development of the 4IR. Considering this context, the study contends that the advent of the 4IR will undoubtedly have particular and uncertain implications on the productivity of SMEs.
Methods and Materials of The Research

Lewis (2015) suggests that a research design serves as a framework and blueprint that researchers must adhere to when investigating their research hypotheses. In this context, the study opted for an exploratory research design to delve into the impact of the 4IR on the productivity of SMEs. By using an exploratory approach, the research sought to thoroughly examine the research objectives, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. This design choice granted the researcher the flexibility to probe the research questions, thereby enhancing the observation capabilities, information-gathering process, and the development of research findings. Therefore, the research questions were as follows: (i) What are the challenges and benefits of the 4IR? (ii) What are the types and characteristics of SMEs? (iii) What are the implications of the 4IR on the productivity of SMEs? As highlighted by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007), key steps in the exploratory design encompassed literature review and conducting interviews, among other methodologies.

This article presents the results from the questionnaires that were administered to the targeted population to solicit their perceptions regarding the subject under investigation. The targeted population were SMEs owners who were selected purposively and randomly to give their insights. It included a sample size of 50 SMEs that were selected from an approximated 129 SMEs in Mankweng Township (Tisane, 2020). In this case, the SMEs represented a diverse array of businesses, including general dealers, taverns, establishments involved in shoe repairing or production, spaza shops, hair salons, panel beaters, vendors, and mini-bus taxis (Maloka, 2013). It has captured data collected to the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) wherein the frequency tables were established. Therefore, Microsoft Excel was employed to analyze quantitative data wherein the tables, charts and graphs were developed.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Theories represent conjectural propositions about the interactions between various elements in the world and their underlying mechanisms. Engaging in theorizing allows us to explore specific and well-defined aspects of reality (Charmaz, 2015). Theoretical literature enhances research by presenting clear and defined theoretical assumptions, enabling readers to assess them critically (Charmaz, 2015). Moreover, it assists in recognizing the boundaries of generalizations that may emerge during the research endeavor. Reiter (2017) emphasizes that theory is essential for guiding our exploration and understanding. It serves as a compass, directing us to where and what to focus on. Additionally, theory helps identify the crucial elements that contribute to the argument. Without it, our perception would be fragmented and meaningless, this would present a chaotic jumble of information. In essence, theories create a framework that bestows structure and significance upon reality. Considering the importance of theory, this study incorporates one significant theory: Technological Determinism theory (TD). By doing so, the research process gains the potential to generate more coherent and logical arguments. This theory is carefully elucidated and its relevance to the subject under investigation is established.

Technological Determinism Theory

The theory originated from advancements in social and biological science (Drew, 2016). The author further argues that the theory takes into account the historical development of technology and its contemporary state. According to Hauer (2017), the theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and social factors with technological progress, which is unavoidable. This implies that technology significantly influences the way people live in today's tech-oriented world, a crucial aspect that cannot be ignored. Additionally, there are guiding principles that underpin the technological determinism theory.

Wyatt (2008) discusses how it is challenging to predict which of the numerous emerging
innovations of the twenty-first century will be recognized by future generations. The author notes that despite the lack of clear causation, people continue to associate localities and epochs with their respective technologies. Bimber (1990) argues that some researchers treat technological determinism as an unquestionable concept in studying technology and societal change. Wyatt (2008) supports Bimber's assertion by stating that technological determinism suggests that technological progress directly leads to societal improvement. However, one concern with this perspective is that it removes human agency and responsibility in the creation and use of technology (Wyatt, 2008). Considering these perspectives, it can be inferred that the theory of technological determinism might be related to and relevant in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which focuses on advanced and creative technologies. The foundation of the 4IR appears to align with the principles of technological determinism theory.

The Advantages and Challenges Presented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution
Various forums, including the World Economic Forum (WEF), and business organizations, have extensively deliberated on the advantages and disadvantages of the 4IR in the 21st century. This revolutionary phenomenon has been embraced by both developed and developing nations, offering the potential for substantial economic growth. The focal point of these discussions and debates revolves around the challenges and benefits that the onset of the 4IR brings to the business sector. Undeniably, the 4IR has made the business environment intriguing by enabling easy access to tasks, online trading, 3-D printing, and other advancements (Rojewski & Hill, 2017; Hoe, Chuan, Hussin & Jiea, 2019).

In this context, it is crucial to recognize the pivotal role played by SMEs in the current economy and the need to support them in competing with advanced technologies. Such support aims to uplift the economic status of communities by generating employment opportunities, whether through self-employment or job creation for others. However, given the ever-changing nature of society, SMEs must adapt their traditional approaches and embrace the 4IR to respond to market demands effectively (Penprase, 2018; Selelo and Khwela, 2020). The 4IR brings the advantage of enhancing and streamlining the cost of doing business for SMEs across different countries. Nonetheless, it is essential to discuss the benefits of the 4IR as a starting point for further exploration.

Improved Productivity and Efficiency
The 4IR offers significant advantages in the business environment, particularly through automation and increased use of robots, resulting in enhanced productivity and efficiency (Guoping et al., 2017; Kang, 2017). This leads to substantial cost savings in terms of labor and production expenses for businesses. The primary aim of the 4IR is to boost efficiency and productivity among SMEs, thereby promoting economic growth and development (Prisecaru, 2016). In the automotive sector in Germany, employing machines and robots has proven to be a more efficient and productive method for manufacturing cars (Wisskirchen et al., 2017). The cost-effectiveness of using robots is evident, particularly in comparison to human workers, with China being an example where robots are a cheaper option (Wisskirchen et al., 2017: 14).

The 4IR heralds a new era for SMEs, as machines and computer systems operate independently of external dynamics, ensuring reliable and consistent performance day and night, even in hazardous conditions (Kang, 2017). Additionally, computer programs and robots demonstrate higher accuracy compared to human capabilities, leading to improved effectiveness, efficiency, and performance for SMEs (Kang, 2017). The decisions made by automated systems are objective and devoid of emotions, as opposed to human decision-making (Schwab, 2016; Morrar et al., 2017; Wisskirchen et al., 2017). The current generation finds the 4IR fascinating as they embrace various devices and technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) and Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) to stay connected and adapt to technological advancements.
Flexible Working Environment
It is indisputable that advanced technology has now become an essential tool for work and communication, significantly influencing the way businesses operate. In this context, owners of SMEs have the freedom to offer their employees the option to work remotely, whether from home or any location that suits them best. Embracing remote work options can lead to substantial cost savings for these businesses. The 4IR presents an opportunity for SMEs to gain a competitive advantage in both local and international markets (Luff, 2017; WEF, 2017). However, this can only be achieved if SMEs adopt and leverage existing innovative technologies to their benefit. The 4IR empowers businesses to create a flexible work environment by leveraging internet connectivity, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) (Schwab, 2016; Wisskirchen et al., 2017). A supporter of this idea would argue that flexibility fosters coordinated business activities, ensuring effective and smooth production, and ultimately, driving business advancement (Schwab, 2016; Naudé, 2017).

Enhanced Customer Networks
The emergence of the 4IR has revolutionized customer-business interactions in SMEs. Previously, SME owners had to wait for extended periods, even months or years, to receive feedback from customers. However, with the 4IR, SMEs now can connect with their customers directly and promptly (Donner & Escobari, 2010). This connectivity is facilitated through various social media communication channels, including Facebook, Emails, WhatsApp, Websites, Telegrams, Google-meet, Zoom, Skype, Twitter, and many others, collectively referred to as the "smart internet". By utilizing these media channels, SMEs can significantly enhance their communication with customers, ensuring effective and smooth business operations powered by updated technology (Donner & Escobari, 2010). Central to these improved connections is a reliable internet connection and proper ICT infrastructure within SMEs (Brookins, 2020; Keevy, 2023). This has become the new norm and primary means of communication among different stakeholders. Social media tools offer a convenient way for businesses to engage with their customers, reducing the need for costly transportation since issues can be effectively communicated and resolved through these online channels. The next paragraphs discuss the challenges presented by the 4IR to SMEs.

Exorbitant Cost and Maintenance
The SMEs in township areas of South Africa are encountering various challenges that impact their productivity, growth, and survival. The new and innovative business models associated with the 4IR are unfamiliar to them, as most SMEs continue to operate using outdated business models. Additionally, their equipment and technical facilities are not updated, causing them to struggle to stay relevant in the current market (Penprase, 2018). This indicates that many SMEs stick to old business models because they appear cost-effective and suitable for their operations. It is possible that these SMEs are still operating within the context of the Third Industrial Revolution, lacking an understanding of how the 4IR would affect their operations due to the slow pace of its adoption. Furthermore, these SMEs often rely on labor-intensive methods for their production and trading (Wisskirchen et al., 2017).

Unemployment
The concerning aspect is that labor-intensive countries such as China, India, and Bangladesh continue to profit from an abundance of low-skilled labor, and Western companies heavily rely on outsourcing their products from these nations (Prisecaru, 2016). However, the advent of the 4IR in the 21st century has caused a disruption in employment opportunities, resulting in job losses as machines and robots replace human workers (Luff, 2017; Naudé, 2017). Industries like clothing and textiles in countries such as Bangladesh and Thailand are particularly at risk of automation replacing human workers (Wisskirchen et al., 2017).

Thuc (2017) and Wisskirchen et al. (2017: 16) project that 47% of employment in the United States
of America (USA) and approximately 70% in Thailand and India are at risk due to the 4IR. This potential unemployment could lead to mass revolt and human catastrophe. While the 4IR offers exciting opportunities for SMEs, it also poses a significant threat to workers, employment, and the overall economy, potentially leading to a national calamity of widespread unemployment in the future (De Villers, 2019). Technological advancements have led to corporate restructuring, impacting employees and emerging entrepreneurs and dampening the potential and confidence of SMEs seeking to enter the market due to the high cost of technology.

Skills and Knowledge
As the 4IR becomes a reality, it raises concerns about the skills, education, and knowledge possessed by personnel in SMEs. The 4IR encompasses advanced technology and innovation, necessitating new skills and knowledge to effectively utilize machines and the internet (Halverson and Collins, 2009). There is a prevailing assumption that the level of skills and knowledge within SMEs is inadequate, and this trend may persist with the advent of the 4IR (Laforet, 2008; Agwa-Ejon & Mbohwa, 2015). Sonit et al. (2015) concur that the primary reasons for poor technology adoption in SMEs are the high costs of purchasing and maintaining technology and a lack of knowledge among SME owners about the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This underscores the importance of updated knowledge about current technological innovations, which appears to be lacking among SME owners. Consequently, this knowledge gap can significantly impact the productivity of SMEs since managers lack adequate understanding of the latest technology, further compounded by limited resources.

Key Findings and Interpretations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Advantages of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on Small and Micro Enterprises</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance productivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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The table above shows the advantages of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in the context of businesses. According to Guoping et al. (2017), and Kang (2017), the 4IR plays a crucial role in ensuring smooth business operations. The survey results revealed that 48% of the sample population believes that the 4IR does not contribute to improved productivity. This group includes businesses like hair salons, driving schools, medical services, shoe repairs, internet cafes, and street vendors, which may not directly produce tangible goods. On the other hand, 30% of the sample group, consisting of businesses like farming, agriculture, carpentry, traditional beadwork, clothing manufacturing, bakery, and catering, acknowledged that technology enhances productivity in their operations.

Efficiency is another significant aspect of the 4IR's impact on businesses, leading to less wastage of economic resources. The majority of respondents, representing 76%, agree that the 4IR enhances
efficiency in their businesses by utilizing machines, computers, or other technological elements to reduce waste. However, 22% of the sample population group does not consider technology as a means of enhancing efficiency and instead relies more on human resources. These businesses, such as hair salons, shoe repairs, and car washes, tend to be more labor-intensive.

Integrating technology in businesses not only improves efficiency but also allows for cost minimization and increased savings. Studies, such as the one by Wisskirchen et al. (2017), indicate that machines and robots are often more cost-effective than human workers. This is due to their constant availability and lack of human-related factors like illness or leave. Consequently, 70% of the respondents in the study agreed that the 4IR reduces costs, while 68% recognized that these technologies enhance savings. Two critical components of the 4IR, the Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) and the Internet of Things (IoT), play essential roles in creating a more digitalized business environment. CPS and IoT facilitate digital connectivity, reducing the reliance on physical trading. The IoT, in particular, relies on cloud-based technologies to collect data from tangible items, enabling quicker and more integrated business operations. The study found that 72% of the respondents acknowledged the IoT as a benefit to enhance business connectivity, and 78% believed that the 4IR improves connection with customers. Social media platforms play a significant role in this enhanced connectivity, allowing businesses to engage with stakeholders more conveniently. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Emails have emerged as important tools in the current era of the 4IR.

The Obstacles of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on the Productivity of the Small and Micro Enterprises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New skills</th>
<th>High cost &amp; maintenance</th>
<th>Infrastructure development</th>
<th>Artificial intelligence</th>
<th>New equipment</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Data security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<td>50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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To commence with, the researcher examined both the benefits and challenges of the 4IR to address any potential weaknesses that may arise. This comprehensive approach aimed to provide a balanced understanding of the 4IR and its pros and cons. Therefore, it is essential to consider both aspects of the phenomenon.

From the sample population, 48% indicated that the 4IR does not pose any threat or challenge to their business. This finding contradicts existing literature by Prisecaru (2016) and Penprase (2018), who emphasize the need for skills and knowledge to adapt to evolving technology in the 4IR. The variation might be due to different business contexts and types, indicating that some respondents may already possess the necessary skills to use technological elements effectively in their businesses. On the other hand, 28% of the sample population acknowledged the need for new skills to embrace the 4IR.

The rising standard of living also brings higher costs and maintenance for technology. About 68% of the sample population indicated that the cost of technology affects their businesses significantly. These businesses, such as medical services, bakeries, catering, panel beaters, and internet cafés, must invest in accessories and keep their machines up to date for smooth operations. Conversely, 30% of the sample population from labor-intensive businesses like hair salons, car washes, traditional beads, and arts, and street vendors, do not consider high costs and maintenance of the 4IR as impactful on their business. Overall, most respondents shared the sentiment that the cost...
and maintenance of technology have an impact on their businesses.

It is worth noting that most SMEs in the township are not familiar with AI. The respondents are not aware of and/or do not use AI in their businesses. AI involves the use of computerized robots or programmed machines to perform tasks that could otherwise be done by humans. Therefore, AI is not perceived as a challenge to SMEs in the township since they do not utilize it. However, 78% of the sample group expressed that current technology demands new and creative machines. This is because some SMEs still rely on old machines that often encounter problems. Adopting new equipment requires knowledge, skills, and training due to their complexity and sophistication. In contrast, 14% of the respondents did not view new equipment as a challenge, indicating that this population group does not heavily rely on machine usage.

Unlike the literature highlighting data security as a challenge affecting business performance, the study area did not find it to be a major concern. Data security refers to the vulnerability of information stored in the cloud to external hacking attempts. Around 72% of the respondents dismissed data security as a challenge to their business, likely because they do not store their business information on the cloud. These businesses, such as hair salons, traditional beads, car washes, driving schools, and street vendors, might not have official websites that could be vulnerable to hacking.

Discussion

Based on the above discussion, existing literature emphasizes that the 4IR will significantly alter the traditional operations of SMEs. The innovative aspects introduced by the 4IR would not completely eliminate conventional methods; rather, they will complement or sometimes replace them. However, it is crucial to recognize that South Africa is not fully prepared for the 4IR, particularly concerning SMEs. Despite the government’s commendable efforts to support SMEs, they still face challenges in areas like finance, skills, technology, and management. To thrive in the 4IR era, it is essential to address these challenges to enhance productivity and efficiency.

Soni et al. (2015) suggest that incorporating technologies like laptops, computers, and smartphones can be a valuable business strategy, especially in the 21st century. By adopting these technologies, businesses can improve their efficiency, effectively reach their target markets, and reduce operating costs. Nevertheless, the article also highlights the obstacles that might hinder SMEs from actively participating in, affording, and sustaining 4IR technologies. Consequently, the study argues that the impact of the 4IR on SMEs could be negative due to these challenges. Evidence from the 4IR indicates that revolutions can promote development and bring about essential changes. Many 4IR technologies are, in fact, extensions of previous developments or revolutions, as demonstrated by Unwin (2019).

Shava and Hofisi (2017) caution that the eagerly awaited technological advancements of this era will inevitably bring about risks and disruptions to business models and operations. A survey by WEF (2016) reveals that the 4IR instils fear in many individuals, both in developing and developed countries. Similarly, SMEs are not immune to this fear when it comes to adopting and incorporating emerging technologies into their marketing strategies. These SMEs find themselves in an unfavourable situation, as they lack the necessary resources to keep pace with the rapidly evolving technology, as noted by Maloka (2013) and Ramohale (2015). Consequently, the impact of the 4IR on SMEs’ productivity cannot be circumvented.

The productivity of SMEs would indeed be influenced by the 4IR due to their continuous struggle with inadequate resources, making it difficult to embrace innovative and advancing technologies. While Vrchota et al. (2019) argue that the 4IR may not be relevant to SMEs, one contends that it is highly pertinent because modern technology permeates every aspect of life, including the
economy, business environment, social interactions, and the environment. The primary challenge faced by SMEs is the lack of resources, which hinders their access to modern technology. As suggested by Verbano and Crema (2016) cited in Vrchota et al. (2019), firms with innovative approaches can effectively integrate modern technologies into their operations, while businesses with limited resources, such as SMEs, risk falling behind in the ongoing discourse surrounding the 4IR.

**Recommendations**

It is essential to provide financial support to struggling SMEs and elevate their financial status. Finances play a crucial role in all aspects of business, as capital investment is fundamental. The research indicates that a significant portion of SMEs are facing financial difficulties. Therefore, enhancing the financial situation of SMEs will lead to increased profits and sales, improved savings, business expansion, access to markets, affordability of technology, and the development of business infrastructure. To accomplish this, collaboration from the government, individuals, and the private sector is necessary to offer financial assistance and ensure the smooth running and sustainability of these businesses.

**Conclusion**

The main objective of this article is to present a concise overview of the key findings from the study area. In the context of Mankweng Township, technology holds a vital role for SMEs. Despite facing challenges in effectively utilizing technology, there is still significant potential for improvement. Providing necessary resources to SMEs is crucial in expediting this improvement, and it is the responsibility of relevant stakeholders to make these resources available. The study also suggests that 4IR can create a competitive market for SMEs, encouraging them to compete and grow. Nonetheless, SMEs’ importance in driving the development of Mankweng Township is undeniable, and their contribution to the local economy must be supported to sustain the momentum of the business market.

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